Traditional Music and Dance in the San Francisco Bay Area
Session: Kulintang
Interview: Lydia and Ron Querian, co-founders of House of Gongs and Gongster's Paradise, an annual kulintang festival
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Moderator: Eleanor Lipat-Chesler (Independent Scholar, Ube Arte)
Additional Participants: Lydia Querian (dancer, performing artist, Kularts, Daily Malong, House of Gongs, and Kulintronica); Ron Querian (Kulintronica founder, Daily Malong, musician); Mary Talusan Lacancale (co-curator)

Interview Transcription

Eleanor 00:00:00
We're recording. Can we introduce ourselves?

Lydia 00:00:08
My name is Lydia Querian, dancer, performing artist. Work with Kularts Parangal Dance Company. Founder of House of Gongs and Daily Malong, and Kulintronica's assistant

Ron 00:00:30
I'm Ronald Querian. I'm the founder of Kulintronica and I'm Daily Malong's assistant, musician at large.

Mary 00:00:45
I'm Mary Tulusan Lacanlale, co-collaborator in this project with Eleanor Lipat. And we're just super happy to have you here. Eleanor, do you want to introduce yourself really quick?

Eleanor 00:01:03
I'm good. I'm just happy to be listening today.

Mary 00:01:07
So, you gave us some of the projects that you're interested in and the things that you've founded. Could you just give us some background? How did you get to a place where you invested your life, and your artistic and creative spirits, into these different projects? How did you get here?

Ron 00:01:03
There's [sic] two different backstories that become one story.

Lydia 00:01:41

I'm personally an immigrant who moved to California about 11 years ago, growing up in Manila, it's very different, right? Because cultural things and cultural activities, performing arts, it's not really that supported in that kind of society. So, it's something that you have to dig deeper on within the community for you to be able to have access to. So, when I moved to California, there's a level of yearning and hunger. So, that encouraged me to be more involved with different organizations. My first exposure in California actually was Kularts with Alleuia Panis. I got involved with one of their projects in 2012, as a performing artist and a dancer. And that's where it all started. Went on a few trips to Mindanao with her, met different artists, including Ron. I think that traveling through Mindanao kind of sparked some of the things that Ron and I have started, including Daily Malong and House of Gongs.

Mary 00:03:18
I really love that story, but if I could get you to elaborate on something interesting—because as a Filipino American I grew up on the east coast and I really had no access to Philippine culture—but, I think your story is somewhat interesting in that you were already there and you did have that access.

Lydia 00:03:40
Growing up in Manila, especially Mindanao where a lot of these things have remained resilient, like Kulintang arts, textile weaving, folk dances, they're alive, and they've been practicing it for the longest time, even spiritual practices. **[00:04:05]** People like me who grew up in Manila have no access to it, because it's all over the news where you can't really go there. It's always seen as a very dangerous place. **[00:04:17]** No matter how I've wanted to visit the places and find out more about myself through the lens of the different people that are still living and still practicing the traditions. It's really difficult for me because one, my parents won't allow me, and second is, because you see them on the news all the time, it's scary, right? **[00:04:48]** But, when I met people like Alleluia, and the Kularts crew, who has been back and forth, and basically just gave a different perspective of the community in Mindanao. In my head, I'm like, "well, I'm gonna have to try it. I had to hide the whole trip to my parents, because it's just going to be a big dramatic thing for them, and they're just going to try to stop me." **[00:05:19]** So, even Ron, I think, the first time he traveled there. The way that he framed it with his parents was: "I'm in Zamboanga," and that's it. We just tell them the stories after we get back. When I got there, honestly, it's one of the most peaceful places I've seen in my life, even more so than California. I think, I'm also fortunate to be able to have that access.

Mary 00:06:03
Thank you. How about you Ron, what's your backstory? How did you get to know about Kulintang and so forth?

Ron 00:06:11
I was born, unlike Lydia, I was born in the States. Born in San Francisco, but raised in Walnut Creek, which is a suburb, an upper-middle-class suburb, about 30 miles east, between 20 and 30 miles east of San Francisco. When I was growing up *there*, there were only a handful of Filipino

families living there, so, I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. **[00:06:58]** I caught the music bug at an early age, and it was my dream to pursue music on a professional level. **[00:07:10]** I came to Filipino cultural Music, the same way a lot of people did, through PCN, but my exposure to PCN was kind of through the side door. So, what I mean by that is, most people will sign up in college to participate in the Filipino student group. PCN is one of their major activities in the spring. Some groups will, if they have the resources, hire live musicians to support their PCN. **[00:08:00]** When I was pursuing professional music, I was just starting out. I was a guitarist, or sometimes a bassist, for different acts, and we were playing top-040, popular American music, in the nightlife. I felt like I was on my way, but there was something lacking there for me, where I felt like there was nothing special about what I was doing, and that what I was spending my time doing didn't really seem to tell a very interesting story. When I think about how my parents made the trip from the Philippines, I was thinking "Did my parents come all the way to the Philippines so that I can scrape off a living playing *I will survive* and *Brick House*? **[00:09:07]** I was really fortunate my mother was active in an alumni association from her college, which was University of the Philippines, and they hosted a rondalla workshop here in Walnut Creek. The instructors of that workshop were members of a group known here as the Jaranistas de Manila. The couple that led the workshop were themselves alumni from a Bayanihan National Dance group. **[00:09:50]** I participated in that workshop and a few months after that, the director gave me a call and told me that one of his musicians could not attend a performance, and asked if I could sub in and so, since I was a performing musician, I asked: "Will I be compensated?" And he said, "Yes, I [sic] will be compensated." So, I was like, "great, I'm in," that was my motivation at the time. **[00:10:25]** I followed all my disciplines. I showed up early to rehearsal, brought my guitar with extra strings, and learned their music. I learned this particular way that they wanted me to strum the guitar to have that rondallia sound, and I felt I was really prepared for this performance. **[00:10:49]** On performance day, which was at the University of San Francisco, their PCN, I had my guitar tuned up, I was ready to play, and I told them: "Okay, where are we going to go, how do we do this? And the director kind of laughed at me. He said, "Put that away, that's not until the second act." And so, I was confused. I was like, "Okay, what are we going to do until the second act?" And that's when he handed me some bamboo instruments, maybe five, and I was trying to carry them, and he's like: "Okay, just carry these, be right next to me, and I'm just going tell you what to do." **[00:11:30]** I was sitting next to him, I had no idea what I was doing as far as these progressive instruments, and then, right before something was about to happen, he would just kind of Whisper into my ear like, this is your rhythm: "ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta," and we just did it. I was so nervous, so on my toes, watching these college students perform these dances that they've been practicing for weeks. I was trying to make it come across like I belonged in the group. **[00:12:00]** We got to the second act, and I finally got my guitar. I was in my comfort zone, and we got through to the end. We did "Maria Clara," we did "The Rural," and "The Rural" was the finale. We did the Tinikling, as is customary in PCN. It's a very involved audience. We did a number of encores for the Tinikling. **[00:12:24]** That's when I had my epiphany moment. There was so much energy in the room and I found it so fulfilling in a way that playing in nightclubs had never really been. I really felt like that was the direction that I was meant to go. I felt that calling. **[00:12:50]** I was really pleased when the director asked me to play, to take another gig. At that time, which was the early 2000s,

this group was doing PCNs for almost every college in the Bay Area. **[00:13:15]** I was doing four to six PCNs a year, for a number of years. So, that's why I say I got in through the side door, because the side door is where the professional musicians usually enter. We don't go in through the front door, right, we go in through the side door. **[00:13:38]** That brought me into Filipino music, and what brought me to Kulintang specifically is: I took a life changing class in college, over at San Francisco State University, intro to world music. One day in class, the professor said that they had a very special guest lecturer. "His name is Danongan Kalanduyan and he's going to play Kulintang." **[00:14:07]** I was a 20-something year old, semi-pro musician that had, at that moment, almost 40 PCNs under his belt. So, when Master K came up with his instrument, I was a little bit *yabang*, a little bit overconfident. I was like: "Oh, I've done these gigs before. I pretty much know exactly what he's going to do, I could probably go up there and accompany him right now." **[00:14:34]** Danny started to play his authentic Datu Piang-style Kulintang, and my face melted to the floor. I'd never heard anything like that before. **[00:14:45]** That's when I had that second epiphany, that moment where I felt like this is something truly special, a sound that I didn't understand. I felt like I needed to go this direction and again, that sense of fulfillment was present. So, when Master K finished that demonstration, I packed up my backpack, and I marched right up to him and asked him if he needed help carrying his instruments back to wherever he needed to go. And I never stopped following him from that moment. And that's pretty much where I've been with the Kulintang since then.

Mary 00:15:36
Wow, thank you for sharing that. I don't even think I ever asked you about the moment that you met Guro Danny, so I loved hearing about that. But, tell me about more of these epiphanies. On one level, you kind of described it as a musical epiphany, but, was there a cultural, or "identity" moment for you as well?

Ron 00:16:08
As someone pursuing professional music, but coming from a Filipino American background, I already had the sense how cultures came into play. I knew that there was a different set of Top-40s for your general American bar-audience that have a certain set of Top-40 songs that they wanted to hear, but if the gig was for a Filipino party there was a different set of Top-40. "Brick House" was not as valuable in a Filipino party, but "Play That Funky Music White Boy" was more valuable. **[00:16:58]** the currency of certain ballads, just among popular American music, I already could sense that there's certain songs that were more meaningful, had more value to Filipinos. That's something I picked up on, maybe in an intellectual sense. **[00:17:22]** So, when I encountered more and more traditional Filipino music, I thought that *that* was like another piece of the puzzle. I figured, I thought that I was learning the Filipino audience better, and, in connection, learning about myself more. **[00:17:48]** That's me looking back on it, but at the moment [sic], it was really an intuitive thing. Something about the sound, or that experience can be overwhelming. Like almost this awakening feeling, where you are experiencing this music or this dance, and it really resonates with you. And, as a Filipino American, you don't know why it resonates with you so much. It's like awakening something latent within you, or within me. I think I was just the type of person that thought that life was supposed to have those life changing

moments, and that they could pass you by if you weren't looking for them. So, I think having that mindset, I was already open to [it], I was basically, at that age, looking for those moments to give me direction. And, it ended up being with Filipino music and Kulintang music especially.

Mary 00:19:12
Lydia, you touched on it as well. Like when you said that you went to Mindanao for the first time, but do you want to elaborate more on any epiphanies you might have?

Lydia 00:19:22
Yes, I'm going to touch on the spiritual side of it, because I grew up in a very Catholic family. Opus Dei, a very strict Catholic family, we really practiced a lot of the . . . secret practices. When I got to my early 20s, I was questioning a lot of things about it, because I was starting to see churchgoers and hypocrisy blending together. And a part of the first trip that I did with Mindanao was attending a ritual for *Ipat*, and I've always known that rituals are supposed to be healing. But for some reason when I was growing up and going to church, [it was always like, maybe because] my parents, or the people that brought me to church did not give me a good context of why we are doing certain things. **[00:20:47] C**oming into the *Ipat* ritual, it was very different, in a sense that there are a lot of similar elements on it, but at the same time, there's kind of like an awakening inside you, that just got ignited for some reason. **[00:21:14]** There was dancing happening during the ritual, there was music and all of that stuff, but it wasn't just a level of performing arts. The way that I felt during that time was the way that I feel when I'm on stage in front of a spotlight. It's a level of losing yourself and giving up your entirety to some higher level of being, and just letting everything else flow until the performance finishes. That was the feeling I had when I attended the ritual that I've never felt before with all of the sacred gatherings that I've attended in my whole Catholic background. **[00:22:17]** So, I think that [was] one of the very important highlights of this whole journey is being able to experience that. Shortly after, I decided to play Kulintang. I'd been wanting to, but I wanted to be able to go to the place where it started, or one, and that was a good opportunity for me to get ahead of it. And then also, I wanted to have my own instrument. **[00:22:42]** It was pretty serendipitous, because the person who gave me my first Kulintang set told me that [sound breaks up, might have said: "I've had this instrument in my] living room for the longest time, and I'm waiting for the right person to give to." **[00:22:58]** This is Faisal. He said: "I decided to sell this to you, because I know that you will take good care of it." That basically brought me to a deeper level of, a deeper relationship with the instrument, with the music, with the culture around it. **[00:23:20]** That basically sparked everything else like the founding of House of Gongs, the indirect relationship that I have with Danny. I've probably met him a dozen times, and in a very limited manner, and that also inspired the whole Gongster's Paradise Festival. That was the beginning of all that.

Mary 00:23:59
This is the perfect segue to ask you about the beginnings of House of Gongs and Gongster's Paradise, and Kulintronica. So, if you want to tell us a little bit about how those began and where they are now?

Ron 00:24:18
After having played with Palabuniyan for a few years, I was developing this skill set on Kulintang, but I also had this pre-existing skill set in American popular music with an emphasis on dance music. We were referencing "Play That Funky Music" and all that. So, for me, Kulintronica was a very natural way for me [sound breaks up] **[00:24:55]** the whole depth of my musical ability. And, I wanted to highlight how Kulintang music is a dance music and that Kulintang music is fun, kind of as a counterpoint to the typical PCN story, which always shows the more solemn, disciplined, serious side of it. That's a big part of it, but it's not [sound breaks up] **[00:25:29]**, there's also the laughing and merrymaking aspect that I wanted to highlight from that. Also, to capture this part oo Filipino American life, where I think for myself and a lot of participants of PCN, we were pursuing this development of our identities, but we were also participating in this active nightlife. Putting all these things together was what I wanted to do from a creative standpoint, to try to contribute to the genre. **[00:26:16]** The big hurdle for me to embark on that was to build trust with Master K and talk to him a lot about how preservation of the culture and also innovation in the culture are both required to move it forward and protect it. **[00:26:55]** If I wasn't actively pursuing Kulintronica, I would not have met Lydia and gone to this next chapter. So, for me there would be no House of Gongs, or Gongster's Paradise without first having done Kulintronica. Kind of taking a step outside of the traditional role of Palabuniyan. Because I met Lydia, not in a traditional setting, but one late night at a Kulintronica gig.

Mary 00:27:27
Could you talk a little bit more about how Guro Danny [what were his] what he expressed to you about Kulintronica.

Ron 00:27:44
Master K was [sound breaks up] . . . in 2004. So, for anyone that is knowledgeable, or studying master K's story arc, I met him at this time where he's already made [a national or] an international name for himself in the field of Kulintang and had become so well known that he also had gained some notoriety and he had some critics back in the Philippines, or out in the musical world. Some critics would try to attack him for doing things that they thought were not traditional, so he did have a little bit of his guard up. **[00:28:44]** He was very talented at inspiring other people to try to protect and preserve the [sound breaks, may have said "the tradition"]. **[00:28:52]** So, knowing that about him and since I respected him so much, I was really careful in how I proceeded in doing my own version of Kulintang. **[00:29:10]** I asked him permission many times and in different ways: "What would you think if someone did this? What, if I did this? What if I blended this with this? To the point I was like: "listen to this, does this make you like, how does this make you feel?" **[00:29:35]** I asked him so many times and he finally kind of stopped me and said (this is after years by the way, after years of working on this topic with him) he told me: "Ron, I taught you Kulintang music so that you could do something with it. And I don't have to like it. So, if you show me your recordings, it's probably not for me, but I'm glad you did." **[00:30:00]** When I got to that moment, I felt like I had enough permission and that he had empowered me. He literally told me: "Do something with it already, stop talking about it."

Mary 00:30:15
Sorry, this has me a little misty eyed, because I miss them so much, but I could just see him saying that. And, just on a side note, in the conversations I've had with him about Kulintronica, he was just excited and never said anything negative to the effect that anyone shouldn't be doing anything. So, I think he inspired a lot of artists that way that were formally his students, but we could talk about that another time. Tell me what led to Gongsters and House of Gongs, bringing all those people together.

Lydia 00:30:54
Stemming out of Danny Kalanduyan, I met him in 2013. One of the first conversations I had with him was in Visayan language, the very little Visayan I knew. His eyes kind of opened up and he was like, "Who are you?" After that, I watched him perform and all of that stuff. **[00:31:30]** So, I was inspired to write an article about Kulintronica at that time and decided to do a little interview with him. I have some footage of *that*, that I couldn't find some reason. That's part of the journey that sparked me doing all the other stuff, because there was a very deep story behind all of the interviews that I did with him and how he inspired Ron and how he inspired other Kulintang artists. **[00:32:11]** When he passed away in 2016, the night he passed away, I had a dream about doing this whole Gongster's—it wasn't named Gongster's Paradise in my dream, it was like some Kulintang festival. I was talking to him in my dream and I said: "You should open it." **[00:32:40]** I woke up at five in the morning and I was scanning through my social media, and then I learned that he'd passed away. So, I woke Ron up right away and said, "He passed away." [That was another level of story]. But shortly after that, I really tried to push for this festival to happen for a couple of reasons. **[00:33:10]** When he had his memorial in San Francisco, a lot of people showed up. And, to me, it was really interesting to see this whole community come together because of his work. And, I was thinking there is a whole Kulintang community, very, very similar to that of Mindanao. The only difference is that we're all spread apart in the northern hemisphere. There might be an opportunity for us to kind of like bring everybody together, have everyone perform what they learned, what they did with the music, and basically just do this whole show in honor of Daniel Kalanduyan. **[00:34:07]** It took us a while to finally decide on it, but it was a lot of work. The first round in 2017, it was just really me and him organizing the whole thing. **[00:34:20]** After that first round of Gongster's Paradise, we received a lot of interest in learning the instrument, or the music, and that's what sparked House of Gongs. So, the way that we frame House of Gongs is the way Kulintang is being learned. It's an oral tradition, something that you pass on. Something that a lot of the people in Mindanao hear all the time. **[00:34:54]** So, we don't really have a very structured way of teaching people. It's basically just, you know, community building, we sit them down, we eat bread together, we jam until they just show up every week and then next and know about a band or you know, how many ever students we have. That's how it started

Mary 00:35:28
So, House of Gongs is like the community-based learning kind of environment for people that want to learn. Kulintang and Gongster's Paradise is the performance that's put on every other

year for people to show their skills and what they've learned in just their different groups? Yeah, that's wonderful. **[00:35:28]** Also, was Kulintang Dialect also started [by]?

Lydia 00:35:28
Kulintang Dialect is a group/slash music that was started by one of Danny's students.

Mary 00:36:11
I wasn't sure if that was connected, or all connected together.

Ron 00:36:18
I'm not sure what impact our work, House of Gongs and Gongster's Paradise, might have had with Conrad. Maybe, it's safe to say that Conrad wanted to show something on that stage that would both honor Danny and also have his voice in it. But, for all we know, he might have been secretly composing music for years, and then just decided to come out of the closet with it after Danny passed away. **[00:37:00]** We're both members [we're both in that band, too], we perform with Kulintang Dialect for Conrad, and we are just about to announce to the world that we've actually produced an album of Conrad's original music.

Lydia [00:37:00] WE SHOULDN'T MENTION THE LABEL (whispered/would need permission to quote) We're trying to establish this music label [Ron: it's all just kind of happening] that's supposed to be all Kulintang music if possible, or anything related to that. **[00:37:53]** We are currently working on Kulintronica's second album. We recorded Conrad and Kulintang Dialect, so that's going to be a double album. And then Faisal. When we brought Fisal here last year for Gongster's Paradise, we also tried to record him, for him to be able to have his own album. **[00:38:15]** The reason being is that, especially with COVID right now, we're slowly shifting into a more digital world. And I think, not just for archives, but also for other people to understand and enjoy the music and have a level of discovery of the music. **[00:38:37]** We figured you probably need to have a few recordings because that's how the generation now accesses music. It's for people who probably do not have access to go to the Philippines, or for people who want to learn, but do not really have the capacity to do it from where they are. **[00:38:58]** Now we've got Spotify and all other music platforms, so we figured this might be a good opportunity for us to do it.

Mary 00:39:09
Awesome, so this really segues into my next question. What do you envision for the future of Kulintang music, among Filipino Americans, or just more broadly across the world? What would you like to see happen and what advice would you give to young players who are becoming interested in this music?

Lydia 00:39:38
Yeah, I personally would like to see more performers. They put in their own twist into Philippine music and dance, respectfully. There's got to be a level of context and respect for the traditional arts. At the same time, there's got to be away for them to be able to show it in their own form that

speaks for themselves. **[00:40:24]** We've got Kulintang electronic music, there is [FU?] RnB Kulintangs out there. It's really interesting to see how other ways it can be merged into other types of genres.

Ron [00:40:40]
I would add that when on a few occasions that Master K would articulate his vision, he would often talk about trying—and I think he succeeded in this—to build a community of Kulintang players in America, build an audience of Kulintang music in America. **[00:41:08]** He thought that the best way to convince Filipinos of the value of Kulintang music was to convince Americans. For Americans to value it first and then for the Filipinos to catch up.

Lydia [00:41:27]
I'd like to add to that, because it's very similar to the weaving tradition, and this is also part of how [w…] sparked Daily Malong. With a few immersions I've done in Mindanao and even in the northern Philippines, the younger generation there, they are all on their phones. They look up to Western things in a very different light. That's what they want to be. Without appreciation of the traditions that have been passed on by their ancestors. **[00:42:05]** However, when they see people from the Western communities—Filipino Americans, people who live in the diaspora, go there, show interest in Kulintang music, waving traditions, Philippine dances, or whatever, practices they have—they slowly start to appreciate it, because they look at the people in the diaspora. **[00:42:30]** even if it's in a colonize manner, the way that they are thinking, it's still a way for us to bounce the tradition back into the motherland for them to be able to appreciate what they already have. I think that is part of the hope, the wish, and the dream.

Ron 00:43:00
I would take it a step further. I'm envisioning a Gongster's Paradise where there is so much new material that there will no longer be room for old man Kulintronica to perform. Where Kulintang Dialect is already a classic and it's nothing but young people of that generation making new works from their own perspective. Things like these are already happening.

Lydia 00:43:34
We are already there. The last one, last year, we were overflowing with performers, it was long.

Ron 00:43:14
There is [sic] people making Kulintang music that I never could imagine, because it's coming from people with different experiences and different perspectives. It's so cool too, it's so fun to listen to new Kulintang players and new music. **[00:44:04]** Also, envision taking this Kulintang community and spreading it further, even just between those that have been educated by Master K, we can all get together and even if we don't know each other's names we can play music together because we have that language. **[00:44:34]** I would like to contribute to proliferating that to the next level and have more people play. **[00:44:50]** You asked what advice we have for people getting into this. It's great that people want to learn Filipino culture, be it music, dance, or whatever learning, that shows that they appreciate it and that's great. But what I really want to

see is how do people internalize Filipino culture and progress it further. What does Kulintang music mean to the generation that is being born now in the post-internet world? They need to put their mark on it also. **[00:45:44]** I think one of the reasons why Kulintang music and other Filipino traditions have remained resilient is because you have one force that is preserving and protecting it, and you also have another force that is innovating it and adapting it as the times are changing. I think you need both sides of that coin for the tradition [you need a balance of that] to last for as long as it has.

Mary 00:46:19
For my last question, I want to be a little bit more provocative. You did bring up the idea of respect, and tradition implies a certain heritage. How do young Filipino, or maybe non-Filipino musicians, or people interested in cultural music, world music, how do they approach this tradition that, in my opinion, takes a lot of skill and studying, and maybe even an apprenticeship with a master teacher? What are some of the limits of those things? Your opinions on that.

Ron 00:47:14
I love this topic, we both love this topic, I think we all love this topic.

Lydia 00:47:27]
I've asked this question to tradition bearers themselves. At one level, before Ron and I did whatever we've been doing in the last five years, we wanted to have their blessing before we move forward with something. I remember one tradition bearer saying that traditions evolve. Sometimes you have to push the envelope to be able to get to a point where you are able to communicate your [sound breaks up] practice in a language that your generation will understand. **[00:48:20]** However, there is always work that has to be done for you to have a better understanding of the root of the work of art. Where it came from, why it is done, how it's been practiced so that you're able to put your own ingredient into it for you to call it your own. **[00:48:57]** It's like cooking adobo, you have your basic ingredients: you've got your suka, you've got your toyo, you've got your meat, your garlic, and your bay leaves. When you know how to make the basic one, you can start experimenting and exploring other things. Putting potatoes, putting carrots, I don't know whatever else you want to do. Put sugar on it, put it on top of spaghetti, or whatever. **[00:49:30]** To me, that's my take on that. Have a good context of where it came from and how it's done in the most basic form. That way, when you are being asked on stage, or wherever else—just how you guys are asking us now how this all comes about—you know how to answer because you know the history. You can explain yourself as to why and how it became this way in your generation, or in your genre.

Ron 00:50:08
I'm going to say that I totally agree with the idea that a Kulintang player should pursue formal study, even a formal apprenticeship. **[00:50:45]** People should, but it's not required because we cannot become gatekeepers when people are inspired by Kulintang music, but do not have access to learning it. **[00:51:07]** I'm thinking of this community in Toronto that has been producing more [sic] new Kulintang music than any of us here in California have been doing, myself

included, in the last couple of years, and they don't have any master artist there. They're just so moved by it that they will do whatever they can. They've gone and created the works; I really salute that they allow themselves to let the inspiration be the permission.

Lydia 00:15:48
To their credit, the way that they did it is that they created works with Kulintang without completely understanding the context of it, aside from maybe a few [sic] exposure to some Bayanihan influence groups. That sparked their interest into the music further to a point where one of their band members travelled to Mindanao with Master K. It was another serendipitous thing that went the other way around.

Ron 00:52:30
They did their new works before they even had the relationship with the culture bearers. They might not have formed a relationship with any of the culture bearers had they not taken that initial step of just taking a chance and doing what they can.

Lydia 00:52:46
I think a lot of this is also about the intent. Even if you don't have the capacity to have that formal training with Kulintang, if your intention is to have that connection with it, or still eventually you'd be able to deepen your relationship with the tradition and the music. Who am I to stop somebody who wants to do that?

Ron 00:53:16
I really like how you framed it with this idea of limits. I think of that in two ways. On one hand, people might venture to create a work, they might try to restage a dance they saw on YouTube, or they might try to make a dub-step trap record with Kulintang in it, they might try to do that. In those cases, it's the community that it's going to self-regulate and say, ok this work was created, and it went too far. The community will say that's the limit, this artist did an experiment and it went too far and we don't really like it. Maybe that will continue.

Lydia 00:54:16
I think it's also the community's responsibility to guide that person.

Ron 00:54:27
Ideally, and that's where your idea about intent comes in. I think the community will self-regulate and you won't really find those limits as far as works created, if people don't take a chance and experiment. **[00:54:43]** The idea of the limit and respect makes you almost like you have to cross this bridge. How do you quantify intent, or how do you quantify respect? And we struggle with this on House of Gongs a lot. **[00:55:00]** We would come up with: "What if we did this? What if they show up a certain amount of times? Maybe that's one way to do it, or you have to say: "Maybe you have to put your money where your mouth is and pay a fee to mean you are serious." **[00:55:18]** But, each one of those methods that we came up with seemed not to maybe fit everyone in every application, so we came up with this thing.

Lydia 00:55:30
We did come up with a very basic framework. “Here is what you pay for a certain number of classes,” but we probably received one or two payments, and we just let them jam with us and learn from us anyway. [Ron: We usually just end up trading] or we trade something like: “come perform with us and you get to learn another piece or something like that. **[00:56:00]** It came to a point where we have the brunch test. I love to cook. Our classes, I wouldn’t even call it classes, our gatherings are normally at 10:30 in the morning on Saturdays. What I do is, I would make brunch for everybody who shows up. Every time we have someone new come in and say: “I’m interested to learn music,” we don’t play for the first session. We don’t play immediately. **[00:56:43]** We sit them down, we eat with them. We do a little subtle interview, but they don’t probably know that we are assessing them. Just to help us gauge what their intent is. Do you really want to learn? Do you just want to use this for something? Or you just think it’s cool, that kind of stuff. **[00:57:08]** Basically, they come in there. If we think that they are really serious about it, we give them what they want. If we think that they are there to explore, they basically get what they ask for.

Ron 00:57:24
If they pass the brunch test, we basically say: “What are you trying to get out of this?” and then we try to give it to them. The thing with the brunch test, and hopefully other people might have experienced this also, but when you engage with a somewhat of a traditional mindset and a culture bearer, there is this idea that the human relationship is more valuable than the transactional exchange of information. **[00:58:00]** So, we can suss that out in a branch test. If people come over and before we’ve served the rice, they are already asking: “What can I get?” That gives us a signal that someone is here to take and extract, but not exchange equitably, if that makes sense. **[00:55:25]** I think that is a good word to set those limits. If the collaboration, the interaction between student and teacher, or between one tradition and another should be equitable. If Master K would agree with jazz musicians, as an example, and those jazz musicians would say: “Ok, we are going to play this standards, we are going to play Misty, we are going to play A-Train, and then you solo here, you solo there.” Then, Master K would say: “This isn’t for me, because they haven’t even made any attempt to learn, or even ask what I would like them to do.” **[00:59:20]** The equity is not there. If anyone has the chance to listen to the works where Master K collaborated in a cross-cultural format, you’ll notice that each tradition made the effort to compromise and come together into a space where Master K would maybe break Kulintang rules a little bit to fit in the other musicians. Then those other musicians would have to stretch themselves to do something to come into Danny’s musical world. **[00:59:53]** That’s how we ended up with the brunch test and I feel that we have a pretty good success rate. I hope that anyone who listens to this that didn’t pass, and are wondering why we never call them back, maybe they’ll know. It’s because they kept asking for stuff, while we were just trying to have a conversation and get to know them. They didn’t even want to do that.

Mary [01:00:20]

I get it. I think it reminds me of the time I met Guro Danny, there was a little bit of a test there. Eleanor, do you have anything else to add? I've kept you a lot longer than I promised.

Eleanor [01:00:50]
I'm wondering if you might consider sharing some recorded examples to go along with the interview, so that we can include it into the archive that's tied to this resource. So, all of these groups and individuals you are talking about, as long as you own the copyright to the material, maybe we can illustrate the story.

Lydia and Ron
Maybe we can send them the montage of Gongster's Paradise

Mary [01:01:40]
What came to my mind when you were talking about not only the brunch test, but how we can equitably exchange culture . . . [recording stops here]

END OF TRANSCRIPTION

KEYWORDS

PEOPLE
Alleluia Panis
Danongan Kalanduyan, “Master K”, “Guro Danny"
Faisal Monal
Conrad Benedicto

GROUPS
Kularts
Daily Malong
Haranistas De Manila
Bayanihan National Dance Company
House of Gongs
Gongsters
Paradise Festival
Palabuniyan Kulintang Ensemble
Kulintronica Q
Kulintang Dialect
Daily Malong

PLACES
Manila
Mindanao
Zamboanga
University of the Philippines
Walnut Creek, CA
University of San Francisco
San Francisco State University

MUSICAL TERMS
Kulintang
Rondalla
Datu
Piang Kulintang

DANCE TERMS
Maria Clara
Rural
Tinikling

OTHER
PCN
Aposte (sacred Catholic practices)
Ipat / Pag-ipat (Mindanao healing ritual)
Visayan (language)
Suka, toyo - food ingredients in Adobo

Transcribed by https://otter.ai (from 00:00:00 to 00:39:38)

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